

Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

8 November 2006, 6 PM - 8 PM

City Hall L280

1. Call to order and Introductions 6:00 PM

SPAB members in attendance: Jodie Vice (Chair), Rob Fellows, Celeste Gilman (substitute acting Board Secretary), Jean Healy, Fiona McCargo, Sarah Ross-Viles, Benjamin Smith, Peg Staeheli

Absent: Christine Tachibana (Secretary), T. Frick, Howard Wu

SDOT staff liaison: Megan Hoyt

Presenter: Mike Hendrix (SDOT)

Public: Denise Gonzalez-Walker (Harborview Injury Prevention Program)

2. Presentation on the Seattle Sidewalk Program 6:05 – Mike Hendrix (SDOT)

Mike Hendrix began by providing some background on the sidewalk project prioritization criteria he was presenting. In the past projects were organized relative to four main topics: arterial streets, school walking routes, transit stops, and pedestrian generators. These were presented to the SPAB in the past by Pete Lagerwey. However, there is a desire to make the project selection process more transparent, and a graduated point system is seen as an approach that could achieve that transparency. The draft proposal is the current working version of a graduated point system for sidewalk project evaluation.

Mike went over the criteria point by point. The first four point categories correspond to the four factors used in the past: street class, school walking route, transit connections, and pedestrian generators. Street class includes points for arterial, one block off an arterial on a residential street residential, and for residential streets serving multifamily housing. School walking routes receive points. Sidewalks near transit stops receive points if they are on route, one block from the route, or one to three blocks, with the number of points decreasing as the distance from the route increases. The number of points for pedestrian generators is treated similarly to transit stops, with points decreasing the further from the generator. Pedestrian generators are defined that same as they were in the past. New categories include safety, missing links, costs, neighborhood income level, neighborhood interest, and special needs populations. In the safety category, points would be given if there had been a crash due to lack of a sidewalk, if there is poor sight distance, high traffic volumes, or other safety concerns to be determined by engineering judgment. Missing link was included

as a category to help ensure new sidewalks are connected to something. Cost and funding opportunities includes points for projects that are low cost, compete well for grants, or where there is an opportunity to piggyback on another project. Points would be given if a project would serve federally designated low-income households. Neighborhood interest points would be available if the project was in a neighborhood plan or there was a formal request. An additional two points would be available if the pedestrian generate serves people with special needs.

Mike asked for the SPAB's ongoing assistance and involvement in the developing the draft criteria, which are likely to evolve over 2007, and for immediate feedback on this draft.

Fiona started the discussion by asking for clarification about the missing links. Mike explained that where there are some sidewalks, but gaps in those sidewalks, there is interest in filling in those gaps. However, it is important to prioritize sidewalks that serve a large population over missing links where there is little pedestrian traffic.

Sarah asked about the definition of multifamily being used. Mike responded multifamily was loosely defined as apartment buildings, but no precise definition has been developed at this time. Sarah also asked for clarification on whether the definition of crashes under the safety criteria was just crashes involving pedestrians. Mike confirmed that was the definition.

Ben requested an example of a safety concern determined by "engineering judgment." Mike did not have an example, but explained it left an opening for identifying safety concerns through a site visit.

Megan talked about cut through streets, and the qualitative difference between Aurora and 15th in Capitol Hill.

Ben asked about the length of the sidewalk segments that will be evaluated. Mike said they would be block-by-block sections. Peg questioned whether that meant two parallel sidewalks from intersection to intersection, and Mike responded that it generally would.

Denise Gonzalez-Walker asked whether the availability of crosswalks and signals would be factored in. Mike thought that might fall under other safety concerns. Denise mentioned that she has worked with Transportation NW at the UW and that they have information on pedestrian crashes. Mike said he has been focused on developing the evaluation criteria, and hasn't yet looked for candidate sidewalk sections or looked at data such as pedestrian crash data.

Peg asked whether the new criteria have been tested on past sidewalk projects. Mike had a few examples. SDOT applied for a grant for Linden Ave and ran the project through the draft point system. It got 18 points out of a possible 25. SDOT

received a request for a project on 12th Ave, but it only got four points. A project on SW 104th got 12 points. On 30th Ave NE between 55th and Blakely the north side sidewalk got 11 points and the south side got 12 points. In general projects seem to run in the 10 to 20 points range.

Celeste suggested adding traffic speed as a consideration under safety, as well as the presence of obstructions along the roadway shoulder. She also suggested adding neighborhood commercial to the list of pedestrian generators.

Rob asked whether the funding would be used partially for new sidewalks and sidewalk repair. Mike responded that it would be used only for new sidewalks.

Rob brought up the city Comprehensive Plan and the focus on urban villages, which states the highest priority is for the city to have walkable urban villages. However, we have urban villages without sidewalks. This is an issue in Greenwood where Rob is president of the community council. City policy in the Comprehensive Plan needs to be reflected in the sidewalk evaluation criteria. He is concerned that neighborhood plans are only given two points in the current draft of the criteria. The neighborhood planning effort took four to five years of community investment, but now there are projects being implemented that aren't in the plans, and this is a concern. Rob suggested that whether a project is in a neighborhood plan should be regarded more as a pass/fail criterion. If it isn't in the neighborhood plan, the project probably shouldn't happen. Rob continued and brought up the issues of partners and opportunities. SDOT is a partner for sidewalk construction. Sidewalks should be incorporated into street preservation and ongoing projects, following the complete streets idea. When streets are reconstructed, it is important to make sure that sidewalks are incorporated into as many projects as possible. Rob noted that when the city's pedestrian master plan is created, this should be a key element. Rob asked whether there was some way that the new criteria could be used for applying for matching funds and street funds. There needs to be a plan for pedestrians and the use of all grant funds.

Megan noted that she has been on the periphery of the criteria development, but knows that focusing on safety first and pursuing projects in the neighborhood plans have been focuses.

Rob said he would be concerned to see safety addressed where sidewalks exist and ignored where they do not. He suggested having some funding dedicated to safety and some dedicated to expansion of sidewalks. Mike clarified that all funds are for sidewalk expansion.

The sidewalk criteria may be included in the planned pedestrian master plan. The draft criteria will be used in 2007 and evaluated. There is a desire to maintain flexibility.

Rob added that from the community council perspective, the good faith thing to do would be for SDOT to say, “we know you have this in your plan, but there is this safety issue, can we talk about it.” However, what seems to happen is that plan is ignored. Community members put four to five years of volunteer labor into creating the neighborhood plans, and this needs to be recognized. The plans may be in need of updating, but they should be by a starting point and there should be discussion with the neighborhoods.

Mike stated that he hopes the point system will not be used as a hammer, and that the existence of the criteria does not negate the need for community outreach.

Denise brought up the criterion related to project cost. Mike said the proposed criteria only apply to sidewalks constructed independently of a road reconstruction.

Ben suggested having two lists for projects: one in urban villages and outside of urban villages. Some of the points could be higher in urban centers. Peg cautioned against two lists, but supported the importance of acknowledging neighborhood plans. She noted that connections between departments are often missing. Acknowledgement of the city’s “urban village strategy” policy should be included in the list of criteria.

Peg also suggested specifying the number of feet instead of saying “block.” There are many different block lengths, so using blocks as the unit of measure could be confusing.

Rob brought up the Department of Planning and Development’s neighborhood commercial strategy and pedestrian zoning overlay. These could be incorporated. Peg asked for clarification about the meaning of pedestrian zoning overlay. Rob said that in areas that are required to have ground floor retail, less parking is required. Communities have been engaged in designating those areas.

Rob suggested a two part screening process. First, a project should fit in with a neighborhood plan. There should be a planning basis. Those projects that pass the first test could then be prioritized. A project would have to pass a higher threshold to be considered if it was not in a neighborhood plan.

Megan brought up the issue that some plans are very specific and some aren’t. Rob acknowledged that the neighborhood plans are not a current planning exercise – they are getting old. However, many of the neighborhoods without sidewalks were specific about their needs. Peg suggested grouping together neighborhood plans, urban village plans, commercial overlays, etc. Between them, there could be as many as five points, but it would be possible to get the points from any of the planning efforts.

Jodie clarified that the category should be “Neighborhood Priority” not “Neighborhood Interest.” Acceptable priority should be inclusion in a plan or a formal request from the neighborhood council. Peg concurred and noted it would reinforce the purpose of neighborhood groups. Rob added that he liked that this approach would not stop SDOT from coming to a neighborhood group to suggest a project. Rob is concerned that there is no formal role that community councils are asked to play in neighborhood plans.

Sarah supported there being multiple ways to get points.

Ben noted that some neighborhoods are more active. If the needs are equal, there shouldn't be a preference given to more active neighborhoods.

Rob brought up the connected issues of sidewalks and drainage, and asked about the possibility of partnering with Seattle Public Utilities. Another suggestion was for community groups to partner with SDOT using grants for traffic calming.

Jean stated the point system needed clarifying, with prioritization of the criteria. Mike noted that the system is not meant to be restrictive. A project may not get a high number of points, but if it is a good project that meets the primary goals it might get built.

Rob asked whether a shorter project would score higher because it would be cheaper? Mike said all projects are limited to \$70,000 or less to be constructed by SDOT crews. Project costs differ by block. Megan noted that some projects are more expensive depending on existing infrastructure. Rob brought up the issue of management of the different functions of the right-of-way. The utility should pay for drainage and can tax people for it. Costs should be assigned by the different functions, not which department proposes the project. The side effect of the current system is that sidewalks are not built where drainage does not exist. Peg added that the \$70,000 cost in the criteria needs to be defined as work done by SDOT crews. The points should match the location benefit. Peg raised concern over the criteria resulting in a large number of small piecemeal projects that could be built with in house labor rather than large projects that would have more overall value.

Ben asked how the criteria would be applied. Mike responded that as requests come in, they are added to a database of requests. He expects at first the criteria will be applied reactively to requests. Currently unfunded projects on the neighborhood street fund list are also being put on the list.

Peg thanked Mike for developing the priority system.

Jodie asked when the criteria will be finalized and start to be used. Mike said there wasn't a firm date. He will take the comments from the SPAB and discuss them with Pete Lagerway. Megan noted that with the passage of Proposition 1,

SDOT will likely be needing to figure out how to spend the new money sooner rather than later.

3. Nominations and Elections for 2007 Officers (6:50)

There was some discussion regarding whether enough board members were present for elections. Megan noted there were eight board members present, so there was a quorum.

Jodie nominated Chris for secretary. Rob added that Chris has done a great job as secretary. Jodie mentioned that Howard will continue to take notes while Chris is gone.

Peg nominated Ben for vice-chair Ben. Jodie nominated Celeste for vice-chair.

Peg nominated Jodie for chair.

Jodie described the roles of the vice chair. The vice-chair attends the agenda-setting meeting and helps contact speakers, although there hasn't been an agenda-setting meeting for some time because so many people have requested to speak. The vice-chair sits on the board member selection committee. If the chair is not present, the vice-chair leads the meeting. Molly was the previous vice-chair.

There was some discussion of how to conduct the voting for the contested vice-chair position. Jean suggested written ballots.

Everyone voted, except Rob, who abstained. Megan counted the votes and said that Celeste had won by one vote.

Peg moved to accept all nominated candidates.

Everyone said "aye."

Jean asked whether the board was voting by proxy for Chris. Megan responded that Chris had said she would be willing to be secretary.

4. Bridging the Gap Discussion (7:00)

Jodie said the budget letter was given to the city. The pedestrian master plan is high on the list of priorities. Jodie's question was now that bridging the gap has passed how fast does the board need to act. Rob asked whether there needs to be a budget supplement. Rob thought the budget assumed bridging the gap funding would not be available. The SPAB has not had the opportunity to comment on the budget with bridging the gap. A follow up letter could be sent that says the board is looking forward to commenting. Megan said she did not

know whether the new funding would go through a formal budget process. Rob noted the new business parking taxes had already been approved, so they were included in the budget.

Rob wanted to know when notice to proceed with the pedestrian master plan would happen and how the process will be managed.

Peg suggested resending the recently sent letter, emphasizing the main points, so the council knows that people are watching and want to see progress on the pedestrian related promises: pedestrian master plan, safe routes to school, etc. There has been more criticism in the newspaper of the pedestrian side of bridging the gap than the traffic aspects.

Rob stated that the pedestrian aspect of bridging the gap was over sold. It was not realistic, but someone has to represent the moral impetus and keep the pressure on.

There was discussion about fliers received during the campaign of specific improvements in voters' local neighborhoods, the accuracy of these claims, and the ethicalness of the campaign if the projects won't necessarily happen.

Jodie said the letter should say the board believes bridging the gap passed because people want pedestrian projects.

Rob suggested waiting to send another letter until finding out when the supplemental budget is going to be passed. Peg disagreed and suggested there could be a third letter, but that a letter should be sent right away to remind council of the importance of the pedestrian projects in bridging the gap. The latter can state the board will follow up with the budget. That will give time to get through budget. Jodie added that hard copies of the letter can be delivered this time and Rob mentioned the whole board could have a chance to review the letter this time.

5. Round Robin (7:10)

Jodie said her group put in a budget request for the plaza to the city, though they don't expect funding.

Celeste asked whether it is considered jaywalking to leave the curb after the red hand starts flashing. Sarah said jaywalking is when a person is violating the laws governing pedestrians, and not stepping off the curb after the red hands starts flashing is one of the laws. Sarah mentioned enforcement of this law that was done for the purpose of showing police presence. Rob raised the issue of pedestrians crossing at the flashing red hand blocking buses. This is particularly an issue where the buses turn onto 3rd downtown. Rob added that he thinks of jaywalking as failing to cede the right of way. If no one is coming, there is no right

of way. Rob suggested proposing an ordinance regarding priorities for enforcing jaywalking rules. Jean asked whether the question was related to jaywalking, and whether jaywalking is when people cross in the middle of the street, outside of the crosswalk. Jean noted that when she walks, she can't always see the signal for pedestrians at the intersection. Instead she pays attention to the green traffic light. She doesn't know whether the red hand is flashing. Megan mentioned that any intersection is a legal crossing. It is illegal to cross between two adjacent signalized intersections, but she did not think it is illegal to cross midblock if there are no signals, as long as the pedestrian is not crossing in front of a vehicle. Rob asked whether an alley is a legal intersection. Megan thought it is not. Sarah added there are substantial problem with cars stopping in crosswalks. There needs to be equitable enforcement of cars and pedestrians.

Fiona had a Get Engaged meeting. There was interest from the design related people in Get Engaged for collaboration. The guy on the technology board who works with Google is interested in collaboration. She can help connect the pedestrian board to other boards.

Megan said there are big changes happening with the ballot success, which is good and scary.

Peg noted that in a group like the SPAB, the focus is on similar beliefs and there is general agreement. She recently attended a Ballard meeting with 20 people. Ninety percent of the people were focused on vehicles and trucking. They did not believe that pedestrian activities deserved the level of effort they were getting. It is important to hear and engage people with different perspectives. These people were vocal and felt they are not being listened to. It is important to understand different points of view and not be become polarized. In the end, their issue is that they don't want to be held liable for accidents. It is important to understand where they are coming from. Rob added that the issue with the Ballard Industrial area is that they draw a connection between trail improvements and what they see as inevitable gentrification. They see the march of yuppie Seattle as inevitable. Part of the issues is safety concerns, put it is also partially just a desire to oppose.

Rob mentioned he finished the draft of the waterfront letter but it needed reviewed. He received comments from Celeste. Jodie said the Governor is going to make a decision in November, the letter should be sent to her soon. The letter supports the city's position.

Rob said he has heard mention that a two lane tunnel might be considered. Rob got a briefing on the 519 project. They have chosen the option that has separate grade separation from 3rd over the tracks. There is a pedestrian walkway built into it that would be the connection to the Sounder station. The SPAB might want to comment again. The board should find out what time would be best to comment.

Megan mentioned a Thomas street overpass option has been selected.

Rob said Transit Now passed and there will be Rapid Ride corridors. The board might want get involved in that. Rob is interest in an advisory on jaywalking. In Greenwood, there is a group called GAIN who is focused on crime. They get hundreds of people to come out. The SPAB doesn't talk much about crime, and the effects on pedestrians. However, they are very serious. Aurora has the highest level of pedestrian fatalities. Pedestrian issues in the corridor are related directly to crime. The board should add crime to the agenda, looking at things such as CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles. Rob noted that what creates a safe/defensible environment isn't part of GAIN's discussion.

Sarah reported that the safety committee met. They are working to get someone to speak about safety from Harborview, Public Health, etc. Sarah has been looking into walkability assessments. Thurston County did a walkability assessment through handing out surveys.

Jodie and Megan explained the general procedure for arranging a speaker is to talk with the chair to make sure the time slot is free, and then to contact the person.

Jean said she also met as part of the safety committee. She had a good discussion with Sarah, Fiona, and Peg. She researched dangerous intersections and is trying to find out what can be done about those intersections.

Peg mentioned a recurring problem. She has called the city but it still keeps happening: all curb ramps at an intersection are replaced at the same time. She understands why this would be done from a construction perspective, but doesn't think anyone has thought about the pedestrian issues. If you have mobility or visual impairments there is no way to get through. You can walk around only if you can see it and can walk around. Megan suggested writing to SDOT. That guarantees a response better than calling 684-road. Peg added that the people doing the work looked like SDOT crews. Megan wondered if they were contractors because projects that Peg had mentioned were big projects. Rob said if there were police officers on these types of projects they could help disabled people across the street. Denise added that she lives near Aurora. When Shoreline was redoing Aurora someone was struck on 145th in a wheelchair. The roadwork and the accident could have been linked. Fiona added that the sidewalk on 75th is being redone and there are no cones, poor lighting, and in places it is necessary to walk in traffic. It is a safety hazard. Jean asked whether Peg had heard from 684-roads. Peg said she had not. Jean stated she has used the website in the past and never gotten a response. Megan suggested sending something to the department of transportation, or to the director.

6. Update on Recruitment (7:40)

Megan said she sent out personal letters and letters to organizations. There has been a widened search this year. She needs to look up the couple that walked every sidewalk in West Seattle.

Sarah asked whether there was a recruitment flier. Megan suggested using the announcement version. As long as the document doesn't have SDOT letterhead and it is the board advertising for the board it should be fine. Megan has a lot of ideas for next time if there is more lead-time. Some applications have already come in.

Peg asked whether distribution of neighborhood representation was considered. Megan responded that distribution of neighborhood representation is an important criterion.

7. Upcoming Agenda (7:45)

Jodie suggested the Rainier safety project. There could be a presentation in December for this. Megan suggested the pedestrian master plan, but in January not December. Peg asked whether the board should go over the pedestrian master plan scoping notes in December. Jodie thought that was a good idea. Jodie added that by December the board should know more about the budget and whether the governor will support the tunnel. One option would be to make it a working meeting with no presentations. Megan suggested checking with the speaker for the Rainier safety project. Jodie said she would.

Jean asked whether approval of the meeting minutes was missed. Jodie said it was. Jean had a change to the October minutes. In her round robin the date quoted should be Oct 25 not Nov 5. Regarding Peg's round robin talking about the cement barrier, the minutes should note that Jean called the City two years ago regarding that same barrier.

The meeting was adjourned.